



# News Release

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## **Fair season is here: have fun and follow health tips to avoid animal diseases**

*Animals can carry influenza and other diseases that can infect people*

**OLYMPIA** — Animal exhibits at state and local fairs provide fun entertainment and learning opportunities for people of all ages. People who visit animals at the fair and especially those who raise and care for livestock can avoid catching illnesses spread by animals by following a few basic health precautions, including hand washing after touching animals.

“While pets and livestock offer many benefits, they carry germs that can make people sick, even if the animals are healthy,” says State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “In recent weeks more than 150 people in several other states have gotten a new flu virus from contact with pigs at fairs. We haven’t had any cases like that in Washington, and we want people to enjoy the fair season while staying healthy by following a few simple precautions.”

In addition to flu, contact with animals can cause other illnesses, including *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157. For example, [poultry](#) and [reptiles](#) can spread *Salmonella* to people. These animals can have the bacteria on their bodies, even when they are healthy and look clean. The germs also get on cages and other things the animals touch. When a person touches the animals or the contaminated surfaces and then touches their mouth, they can be infected. Parents should make sure their children wash their hands thoroughly after visiting animal exhibits at the fair.

Following these healthy tips can help reduce the spread of [disease between animals and people](#):

- Wash hands with soap and water, especially after exposure to animals. If soap and water aren’t available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Never eat, drink, smoke, or put things in your mouth in animal areas; don’t take food or drinks into animal areas.
- Never take toys, pacifiers, spill-proof cups, baby bottles, strollers, or similar items into animal areas.

- Avoid close contact with animals if they look or act ill.

Given the recent infections with the new influenza virus, people at higher risk for complications from flu — the very young, the very old, pregnant women and those with certain underlying diseases — should consider avoiding exposure to pigs and swine barns this fair season, especially if sick pigs have been identified. People who develop symptoms of the flu such as fever, cough, sore throat, or muscle ache after contact with pigs should tell their doctor right away. Medication is available to treat flu infections, but it works best when started quickly.

As with many infectious illnesses, the most important ways to stop the spread of illness include: hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when you're sick. Getting the annual flu vaccination and other age-appropriate immunizations also helps people avoid serious, preventable illnesses.

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